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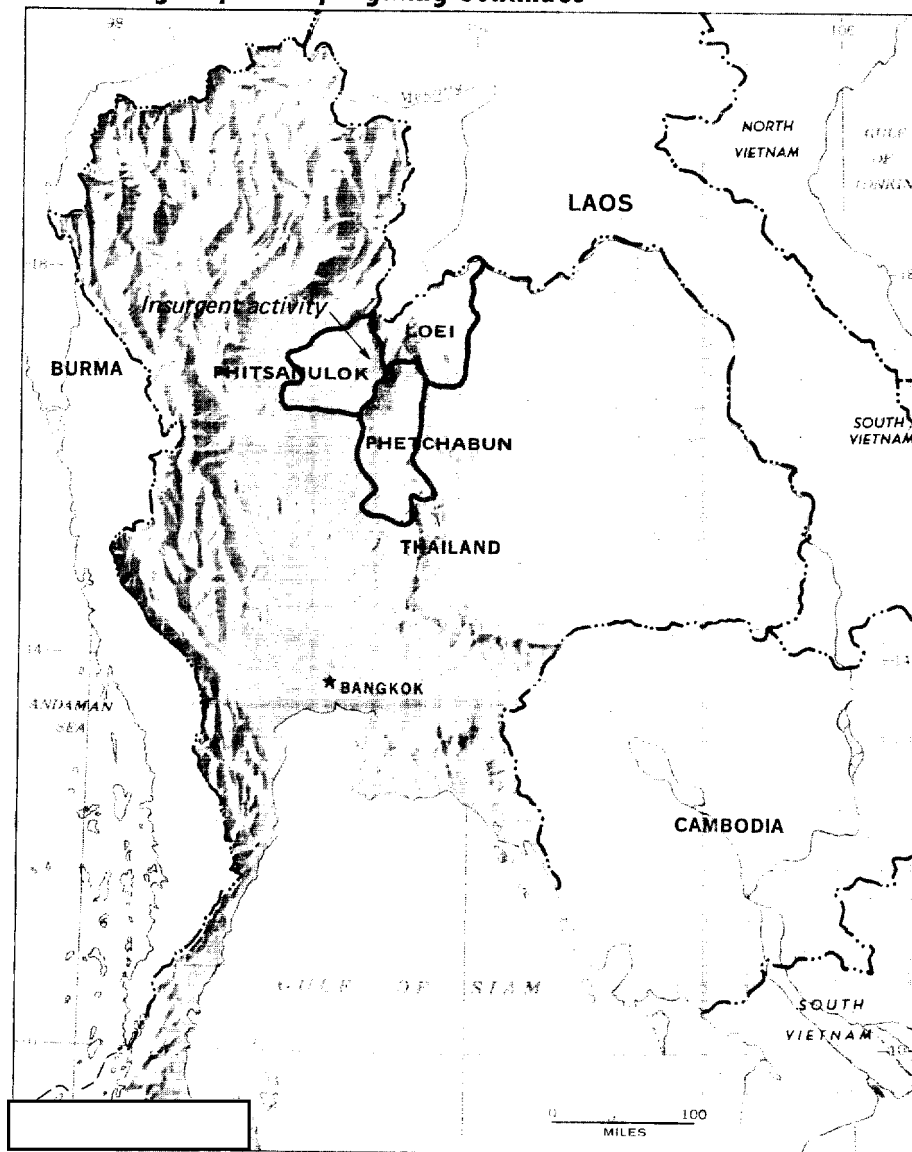
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Thailand: Government forces are making little headway against insurgents in the north-central region.
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Thai Insurgency: Heavy Fighting Continues

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Thailand: Government forces are making little headway against tenacious tribal insurgents in the north-central region.

Heavy fighting continues to flare on a high plateau straddling the Phitsanulok-Phetchabun-Loei provincial border as well-armed insurgents resist efforts to drive them from fortified villages. For almost two weeks, the guerrillas have been beating back efforts to evacuate provincial police platoons surrounded in two tribal villages. At least one helicopter has been shot down in the effort to re-supply the beleaguered men.

Additional reinforcements are moving into the triborder area and a relief column is being deployed overland. The relatively small number of government troops in the operation, however, and the insurgents' greater familiarity with the rugged terrain do not augur well for its success.

It is not yet clear how many insurgents are involved in the current north-central offensive, or whether their ranks have been augmented with elements from Laos. The tenacity, skill, and planning that the insurgents have shown amount to their best effort since the Thai insurgency began four years ago, and suggest that veterans are leading the guerrillas.

The reverses that government forces have suffered at the hands of the insurgents in the north-central region over the past month have had a strong, and possibly prolonged, psychological effect. Rumors among the Thai population in the area about other impending guerrilla attacks reveal a sense of foreboding and insecurity that the Communists have failed to generate elsewhere in Thailand.

The fact that the insurgents are largely Meo tribesmen has whipped up strong racial feeling, which threatens to drive another wedge between the government and the tribespeople.

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